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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KARACHI 000220

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SUBJECT: SINDH -- MQM LEADER SAYS PARTY LEFT OUT OF NATIONAL/PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS

REF: A. A) KARACHI 141
 1B. B) KARACHI 159

Classified By: Kay Anske, Consul General, 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: On March 14, Farooq Sattar, Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) leader, told the Consul General that his party has not been approached to participate as a coalition partner in either the national or Sindh provincial governments. He was not in favor of a blanket restoration of the judiciary to its pre-November 3 status and said he feared the new national government would incorporate Sharia law in Pakistan. Sattar speculated that the national and provincial governments might reduce funding to the Karachi city government and hinted at possible retribution by MQM members for continued attacks by Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) workers. During the meeting, he outlined a Machiavellian plan for maneuvering an ally of PPP leader Asif Zardari into the Sindh Chief Minister position and disavowed MQM interest in the Sindh governor's slot. End summary.

National Government

¶2. (C) In a March 14 meeting with the Consul General, Farooq Sattar, Deputy Convener of the Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM), said his party had not been asked to participate in a national coalition government and was content to sit in opposition in the National Assembly (NA). (MQM controls 25 of the 342 NA seats.) Describing the current situation as &do-or-die& time for the country, Sattar added that he felt what Pakistan needed most was a &clear-headed& approach to governance that did not focus on past rivalries at the expense of addressing problems such as security, terrorism, energy and food shortages, and water quality. He was concerned that the new government would become bogged down in controversy over the continued role of President Pervez Musharraf and over the restoration of the deposed judiciary. He felt that Musharraf should get credit for holding free and relatively fair elections.

¶3. (C) Questioning the legitimacy of the current judiciary since it was installed under the Provisional Control Ordinance (PCO), Sattar said that he was not in favor of restoring it to its pre-November 3 state. Instead, he referred to a 2007 agreement between the late Benazir Bhutto and Pakistan Muslim League-N leader Nawaz Sharif to establish an independent commission to vet a new judiciary that did not take oaths under the PCO.

Concern Over Role of Islamic Fundamentalism

¶4. (C) Sattar was concerned about the rising role of Islam in Pakistani politics. Characterizing PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif a &mullah without a beard,& Sattar said he feared participation of PML-N in a new government would be a precursor to full incorporation of Sharia law in Pakistan.

He predicted the current government would return to the policies of former president Zia ul-Haq that encouraged the growth of the Taliban and other radical Islamic movements in the 1980s. (Note: In earlier conversations, CG was reminded by the MQM that Zia ul-Haq had publicly declared Nawaz Sharif to be his &son8. End note.)

Sindh Provincial and City Governments

¶5. (C) Sattar said that Pakistan People's Party (PPP) representatives had only approached MQM once to discuss a possible power sharing arrangement in the new Sindh provincial government with, what he claimed, was a low-level delegation. (Note: The only high ranking person on the delegation was PPP Sindh President Qaim Ali Shah. End note.)

The PPP has enough Provincial Assembly members to form a government without a coalition partner, and Sattar said MQM was content to sit in the opposition in the Assembly. In that role, he said he was worried that the provincial and central governments would cut off or severely limit funding to the Karachi municipal governments in a repeat of what occurred in the 1990s when PPP controlled the Sindh Provincial government and MQM was in control of Karachi.

¶6. (C) Sattar claimed that PPP-affiliated gangs had attacked and killed MQM party officials after the elections. He said he has urged his party members to exercise restraint in the face of these provocations. However, he warned that he was not sure how much longer he could keep MQM rank and file in check, raising the specter of a return to large-scale violence between the parties in Karachi.

¶7. (C) At the city level, he pointed out that PPP was interested in eliminating the local body structure initiated

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by Musharraf which gave every Pakistani city direct authority over its operations in lieu of provincial control. He opined that PPP wanted to eliminate this structure because it gave too much power to the local governments and diluted the power of the &feudal lords,⁸ which he equated to PPP leadership.

New Sindh Chief Minister

¶8. (C) Sattar termed the PPP appointment of Qaim Ali Shah as Sindh Chief Minister (CM) a political maneuver designed to ultimately ensure the appointment of Agha Siraj Durrani, a close ally of PPP leader Asif Zardari, who spent years in exile with him. Since Shah is from the branch of the PPP that remained in Pakistan during the Bhutto exile years, the appointment will placate that segment of the party. However, as Sattar explained it, Shah is widely deemed to be incompetent and ineffective and will most likely fail as CM, forcing PPP to appoint another CM, who he speculated would be Durrani.

¶9. (C) Comment: Clearly frustrated at PPP's snub, Sattar is lashing out with wild accusations and allegations about the new government. The media reported on March 17 that MQM would join with PML in the opposition in the National Assembly. His concern that the national and provincial governments may cut funding to the city coupled with his warning that the party rank-and-file may be difficult to restrain in the face of claims of PPP violence against MQM workers could foreshadow a return to open hostility and violence between the two parties. End comment.

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